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Response by official statistics to the Sustainable Development Goals

Update on the ongoing process to develop an indicator framework for the Post-2015 Development Agenda[1]

Note by the United Nations Statistical Division

Summary

This paper focuses on the process of the development of the global indicator framework for the Post-2015 Development Agenda. It informs the Conference of European Statisticians on the activities of the Friends of the Chair group on broader measures of progress, and the inter-governmental negotiations and work on the indicator framework. The paper concludes by considering briefly the work ahead.

The paper is presented for discussion to the second session of the Conference of European Statisticians' seminar "Response by official statistics to the Sustainable Development Goals".

[1] This paper focuses exclusively on the process of the development of the global indicator framework for the Post-2015 Development Agenda. It will not inform about the process on financing for development, nor will it cover related work on the data revolution, big data and a transformative agenda for official statistics, statistical capacity building etc.

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I. First phase: the activities of the Friends of the Chair group on broader measures of progress

1. The possibility of an indicator framework for the Post-2015 Development Agenda and related mechanisms for its implementation were initially considered by the Friends of the Chair group of the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC) on broader measures of progress.

2. At its forty-fourth session, in March 2013, the Statistical Commission established the Friends of the Chair group (FOC) on broader measures of progress (decision 44/114) as a response to the request of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20 Conference) to launch a programme of work on broader measures of progress to complement GDP in order to better inform policy decisions. The group was also requested to monitor closely the ongoing debate on development frameworks and to keep the Bureau of the Statistical Commission informed. The group was expected to undertake an active dialogue with United Nations bodies and the policy sphere in order to ensure that a robust statistical measurement approach be incorporated from the outset, in preparations for the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

3. Since its inception, FOC conducted the following activities through a very active participation and extensive work by all its members and with the support of the United Nations Statistics Division:

(a) May 2013: The FOC website was launched to provide information and a platform for the ongoing work of the FOC, reflecting the commitment of the group to operate in an open, transparent and inclusive manner;

(b) July-October 2013: The FOC reviewed the report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons (HLP Report) from the point of view of its implications for statistical work;

(c) September 2013 - March 2014: The FOC contributed to the drafting of a compendium of 29 statistical notes that were provided to the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (OWG) as input to the deliberations on the sustainable development goals (SDGs). The statistical notes were drafted under the auspices of the FOC by experts from many national statistical offices and international organizations, under the coordination of the United Nations Statistical Division;

(d) December 2013: FOC finalized its first report to the Statistical Commission, presenting a stocktaking exercise of current national, regional and international practices on broader measures of progress and discussing the prospects for and the way forward towards a technically solid and globally agreed set of measures of progress and the measuring and monitoring of the goals of the Post-2015 Development Agenda. A separate section presented key messages for policy makers, proposals for the further involvement of official statisticians in the ongoing debate and processes towards a Post-2015 Development Agenda, and proposals to carry out the work programme on broader measures of progress;

(e) 17 December 2013: FOC contributed to the organization and conduct of an informal session of the OWG on measuring progress;

(f) March-April 2014: FOC provided comments on the indicator proposal of the Sustainable Development Solution Network (SDSN) and an initial assessment of the 100 proposed indicators in terms of measurability, based on a consultation with FOC members and international organizations;

(g) June 2014: FOC provided the OWG Co-Chairs with a matching between available indicators and the targets contained in the OWG's "Zero draft," and an

assessment of the broad data availability for these indicators in countries. This input was partly based on the FOC's work on the SDSN indicator proposal;

(h) September 2014: The United Nations Statistics Division in New York presented a note to the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities on the work on the indicator framework for the Post-2015 Development Agenda informing about the possible arrangements for the development of the indicator framework;

(i) September 2014 - January 2015: FOC developed and conducted a survey (i) to complete the compendium of national practices on broader measures of progress and (ii) to obtain information on the availability of data for indicators to measure the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the associated 107 substantive targets proposed by the OWG (the targets on means of implementation were not included). The results of the survey, in which 91 countries participated, were presented in two background documents to the forty-sixth session of the Statistical Commission;

(j) December 2014: FOC finalized its second report to the Statistical Commission providing a roadmap and timetable for the development and implementation of the global indicator framework for the goals and targets of the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

4. The work of the FOC was instrumental in creating awareness and recognition by the intergovernmental process on the Post-2015 Development Agenda of the role of the global statistical community and the Statistical Commission, as its main intergovernmental body, in the preparation of the indicator framework for the goals and targets of the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Furthermore, FOC did important preparatory work for the development of the indicator framework and created awareness for this task among national statistical offices in countries.

II. Second phase: Inter-governmental negotiations and work on the indicator framework

5. In December 2014, the General Assembly launched the process for the negotiations on the Post-2015 Development Agenda and, in its resolution 69/L.46, decided that the proposal by the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals would be the main basis for integrating sustainable development goals into the Post-2015 Development Agenda. This marked the beginning of the final phase of the work in preparation of the new development agenda and its goals and targets. The following activities on the preparation of the indicators have taken place since then:

(a) December 2014-January 2015: In their letter of 19 December 2014, the Co-facilitators of the intergovernmental negotiations on the Post-2015 Development Agenda requested the United Nations Statistical Commission to provide a provisional proposal in relation to indicators for sustainable development goals and targets, to be discussed as an input to the intergovernmental negotiations at its session of 23-27 March 2015. In her response to the Co-facilitators, the Acting Chair of the Statistical Commission confirmed that the UNSC would provide the necessary statistical support for the elaboration of the Post-2015 Development Agenda, while also expressing the concerns of Members of the Commission regarding the enormous challenge that a large number of indicators would pose for national statistical systems. Also, the Acting Chair of the UNSC indicated that any preliminary proposal would need to allow for all required technical adjustments and completion at a later date;

(b) January-March 2015: National statistical offices of all United Nations Member States were contacted by the United Nations Statistics Division as the Secretariat

of the Statistical Commission, to provide their initial assessment of the over 300 proposed provisional indicators. Seventy countries replied to this request. The 304 proposed provisional indicators were compiled from submissions of experts from international agencies, organized as clusters under each goal, based on the cluster structure of the Technical Support Team for the Open Working Group on SDGs;

(c) 25-26 February 2015: An Expert Group Meeting on the indicator framework for the Post-2015 Development Agenda (EGM) brought together participants from countries, agencies, funds and programmes, and regional commissions as well as representatives from civil society, academia and Permanent Missions to the United Nations. The meeting made important recommendations for the development of the indicator framework that were provided to the forty-sixth session of the Statistical Commission the following week;

(d) 3-6 March 2015: The Commission, at its forty-sixth session (3-6 March 2015), endorsed the roadmap for the development and implementation of a global indicator framework and, in particular, the formation of the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs), to be tasked with fully developing a proposal for the indicator framework for the monitoring of the goals and targets of the Post-2015 Development Agenda at the global level, under the leadership of the national statistical offices, in an open and transparent manner. The Commission also endorsed the suggested timetable that foresees the presentation by the IAEG-SDGs of an indicator framework at the forty-seventh session of the Commission in March 2016 for its review and approval;

(e) 23-24 March 2015: At a session of the intergovernmental negotiations on indicators, Member States reviewed and discussed the technical report by the United Nations Statistical Commission presenting the preliminary and indicative indicators proposed by experts of the United Nations system and their assessment by national statistical offices (see above). FOC assisted in the drafting of this report. At the intergovernmental negotiations, Member States expressed overall great appreciation for the work done by the statistical community and welcomed the technical report by the Statistical Commission. Member States also supported the roadmap as endorsed by the Statistical Commission for the development of the indicator framework for the Post-2015 Development Agenda and the establishment of the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG indicators (IAEG-SDGs);

(f) 21 May 2015: The Chair of the United Nations Statistical Commission, Mr. John Pullinger, addressed the intergovernmental negotiations on the Post-2015 Development Agenda to provide an update on the process to develop an indicator framework for the goals and targets of the agenda. In his statement, Mr. Pullinger re-assured Member States that the development of the global indicator framework would be fully based on goals and targets as presented in the report of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (OWG) and reviewed during these ongoing intergovernmental negotiations and endorsed at the High-level summit in September 2015 (see http://unstats.un.org/sdgs/2015/05/27/update-on-process-to-develop-indicator-framework/); John Pullinger is expected to present an update on the progress of work on the indicators in one of the July sessions of the intergovernmental negotiations;

(g) 1-2 June 2015: The main objectives of the first meeting of the IAEG-SDGS were to set-up the process for the development of the indicator framework, develop a work plan and agree on the way forward, establish the methods of work of the group, and to discuss technical issues, including the interlinkages across targets and data disaggregation. As an input to this meeting and based on the initial assessment of proposed provisional indicators by Member States in February/March (see above), the Statistics Division prepared a compilation of indicator proposed by the relevant agencies and related metadata. The Annex contains the draft conclusions of the meeting;

(h) 2 June 2015: The zero draft of the outcome document for the UN Summit in September 2015 was made available. This zero draft was provided by the Co-Facilitators of the intergovernmental negotiations on the Post-2015 Development Agenda to facilitate preparations for the next intergovernmental negotiations scheduled for 22-25 June 2015. The following four points should be highlighted, which are of particular relevance to the preparation of the indicator framework:

(i) In its introduction (page 2), the heads of State and Government of the 193 member States of the United Nations reiterate that "poverty eradication is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development." Member States intend "between now and 2030, to end poverty and hunger once and for all; combat inequalities; to ensure the lasting protection of the planet and its resources; and to create conditions for sustainable, inclusive and sustained economic growth and shared prosperity." Furthermore, member States "pledge that nobody will be left behind". These statements constitute the essence of what Member States intend to accomplish;

(ii) In section I. - Sustainable Development Goals and targets (page 7), it is stated that quality disaggregated data will be needed to help with the measurement of progress. Member States agree to intensify their efforts to strengthen statistical capacity in developing countries, particularly least developed countries and other countries in special situations.

(iii) In section I. - Sustainable Development Goals and targets (page 8), it is stated that the goals and targets will be followed-up and reviewed using a set of global indicators which will be developed by the IAEG-SDGs and will be finalized by March 2016 under the guidance of the Economic and Social Council and the UN Statistical Commission;

(iv) In section III. - Follow-up and Review (page 30), it is stated that follow-up and reviews at the High-level Political Forum would be informed by the Global Sustainable Development Report. A separate annual SDG Progress Report will be prepared by the UN Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG indicators, based on data from national statistical systems.

III. The work ahead

6. The work for the development of the global indicator framework will bring together representatives of national statistical systems as the official members of the IAEG-SDGs, with the contribution by experts from the international statistical system, including from international agencies, regional commissions and other entities, and by experts from civil society, academia and other stakeholders.

Annex

Draft Conclusions of the first Meeting of the Inter-agency and Expert Group on the Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) New York, 1-2 June 2015

Below are the main conclusions of the meeting. A detailed technical meeting report will follow.

The IAEG-SDGs:

1. Recalled the guidance provided by Member States at the March meeting of the inter-governmental negotiations that indicators must directly respond to the goals and targets agreed in the Open Working Group and their level of ambition; must not undermine or re-interpret the targets; must cover all targets, including targets on means of implementation and give equal weight to all targets; must maintain the balance achieved, and should not introduce any new or contentious issues; furthermore, there also appeared to be broad agreement among Member States that the number of global indicators should be limited and should include multi-purpose indicators that address several targets at the same time.

2. Recalled the results of the Expert Group Meeting on the indicator framework for the Post-2015 Development Agenda, New York, 25-26 February 2015 in respect to the design of the indicator framework and the criteria of indicator selection, and agreed to take those criteria into account and to follow a framework approach in its work; recognized that, while the number of global indicators must be limited, some targets might require multiple indicators to measure its different aspects; recognized the need to systematically address the issue of disaggregation, and to leave no one behind.

3. Recalled that the IAEG-SDGs, according to its Terms of Reference, will develop a proposal for an indicator framework and a list of indicators for the monitoring of the goals and targets of the Post-2015 Development Agenda at the global level; its proposal will be considered for adoption by the Statistical Commission at its 47th session in March 2016 and later presented to the designated political inter-governmental process for its consideration.

4. Stressed that the role of the IAEG-SDGs members should include consultation and coordination within their own national statistical system, and should also include reaching out to the countries in their respective region and sub-regions; following the practice during this first meeting, the IAEG-SDGs will also consider contributions by observers; stressed the important contributions of the regional commissions and regional and international agencies, in particular as entities responsible for the compilation of indicators at the global level and/or for the conceptual and methodological development in their specific areas of work based on their existing mandates and will invite them to contribute their expertise during its consultations; stressed the important contributions of Major Groups and other stakeholders in the indicator development process, and will ensure their further involvement through an appropriate channel of consultations.

5. Agreed that the invitation to all members of the IAEG-SDGs and meeting materials need to be provided sufficiently ahead of the meeting to allow the attendance of the technical experts of all members and sufficient time for the review of the materials.

6. Agreed that the draft meeting conclusions will be sent to all members for their review.

7. Requested that the information on the activities of the IAEG-SDGs be available in a fully transparent manner to all Member States and recognized in this context the establishment of a website on SDG indicators (http://unstats.un.org/sdgs/); this website will

contain all documents of the meeting, extensive metadata and all inputs and statements contributed during the meeting, and will be regularly updated.

8. In order to conduct its work efficiently and in a timely manner, agreed to establish two discussion streams to which all members of the IAEG-SDGs are invited and encouraged to participate: the first one focusing on conceptual frameworks and indicator concepts and definitions, and a second one focusing on identifying interlinkages among indicators across goals and targets.

9. Agreed to invite members of the IAEG-SDGs to express their interest to lead as facilitators the work of the two discussion streams and noted the offers of the Philippines to facilitate the first and of Italy to facilitate the second discussion stream.

10. Stressed that the two co-chairs of the IAEG-SDGs should act in a neutral and impartial way, and following the established practices of the Statistical Commission, refrain from stressing and promoting their own views and facilitate the discussion allowing for all members of the group to fully participate in the discussion.

11. Requested the Secretariat to provide by 23 June a full explanation of the contents and rationale of the two lists of indicators that were provided as inputs for the discussions, and to make available the list of proposals incorporating any additional inputs or corrections received at the meeting; requested the Secretariat to clarify how the lists took in full consideration the assessment of preliminary and indicative indicators conducted in February/March 2015 that was presented in a technical report by the UN Statistical Commission to the inter-governmental negotiations in March 2015 and in which 70 countries participated.

12. Requested the Secretariat to provide as soon as possible a refined tentative timeline and work plan which will consider sufficient time for both discussion streams to conclude their work and, if feasible, provide a first compilation of possible indicators for a global indicator framework, allow a second round of consultation and provide an updated compilation of possible indicators four weeks ahead of the second meeting of the IAEG-SDGs.

13. Agreed that the next meeting of the IAEG-SDGs should be a three-day meeting and would be tentatively scheduled for 26-28 October 2015.

14. Agreed that the proposal for a global indicator framework will be finalized by the end of November for a timely submission to the 47th session of the Statistical Commission in March 2016.

15. Requested the Secretariat to set-up an electronic collaboration platform to facilitate the work of the IAEG-SDGs ensuring the opportunity of equal participation of all members.